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ABSTRACT

A study examined a program for promoting standard writing skill development to facilitate effective communication. Targeted were three regular third- and fourth-grade classes and one bilingual fourth-grade class in growing, middle class communities located west of a large metropolitan area. The lack of developmentally appropriate spelling and standard conventions were documented by teacher and parent surveys, student inventories, and assessments of writing performance. Results, through analysis of probable cause data, indicated that student writing contained deficiencies because of misinterpretation of whole language theories, absence of consistent, school-wide writing programs, ineffective spelling programs, and difficulty in acquiring English as a Second Language. Findings, through reviews of curricula content and instructional strategies, suggest that both time constraints and limited background knowledge prohibited teachers from providing effective individual instruction. The out of context nature of previous language programs had left students without sense of both ownership and involvement in written language. A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with analysis of the problem setting, resulted in selecting four major categories of intervention. Writers workshop and cooperative learning strategies, along with a teacher-designed spelling program, were all implemented and incorporated into a whole-language setting. Post-intervention data indicated that the direct instruction of writing and spelling strategies was effective in improving the written communication abilities of the targeted students. Both English and bilingual students benefited from this intervention. Appended are various test and survey results and sample forms. (Contains 30 references.) (Author/CR)

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ED 413 610

HELPING STUDENTS BECOME MORE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATORS THROUGH THE PROPER USE OF SPELLING AND CONVENTIONS IN THEIR WRITING

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education in partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

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Dedication

To our families
whose love, support, and patience
encouraged us to reach our goals.

Miriam Aravena
Dena Farrell
Barbara Messina
Sharon Neswold

ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for promoting standard writing skill development in order to facilitate effective communication. The targeted population consisted of three regular third and fourth grade classes and one bilingual fourth grade class in growing, middle class communities located west of a large metropolitan area. The lack of developmentally appropriate spelling and standard conventions were documented by teacher and parent surveys, student inventories, and assessments of writing performance.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed that student writing contained deficiencies due to misinterpretation of whole language theories, absence of consistent, school-wide writing programs, ineffective spelling programs, and the acquisition of English as a second language. Reviews of curricula content and instructional strategies revealed that both time constraints and limited background knowledge prohibited teachers from providing effective individual instruction. Due to the out of context nature of previous language programs, students were missing a sense of both ownership and involvement in written language.

A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of four major categories of intervention. These interventions included the implementation of writers workshop and cooperative learning strategies, along with a teacher-designed spelling program, were all incorporated into a whole-language setting.

Post-intervention data indicated that the direct instruction of writing and spelling strategies were effective in improving the written communication abilities of the targeted third and fourth grade students. Both English speaking and bilingual students benefitted from this intervention.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

Problem Statement

The students of three targeted regular third and fourth grade classes and one bilingual fourth grade class exhibit a lack of standard writing skills that interfere with effective communication. Evidence for the existence of the problem includes teacher and parent surveys, student inventories that document poor writing skills, and assessments of student writing performance.

Immediate Problem Context and The Surrounding Community

Immediate Problem Context School A

School A is an elementary school containing grades kindergarten through fifth. The total enrollment is 562. The student ethnic background, as reported in The 1996 School Report Card, consists of 97.2% White, 0.5% Black, 1.1% Hispanic, 1.2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and none Native American. None of the student population comes from low-income families, and none are limited-English-proficient (LEP). The school attendance rate is 96.4% with an 9.1% mobility rate.

The elementary school administrative staff is comprised of a full-time principal, an assistant principal, and two secretaries. The instructional staff has 22 classroom teachers, and 13 special and support teachers provide services for vocal and instrumental music, physical education, art, special education, gifted education, speech, Project Success, health care, psychology, and social work. There are 11 classroom assistants and one Learning Resource Specialist.

The faculty is 100% White with 4% male and 96% female. Within the staff, 50.2% of the teachers have a Bachelor's Degree, and 49.8% have a Master's Degree or above. The average teaching experience is 12.5 years. (1996 School Report Card)

School A, located on approximately 14 acres, is a one-story brick building constructed in 1964 in a residential area. The building houses 26 classrooms. In addition, there is a learning center, a computer lab, and a gymnasium that is shared with the local park district. There are multiple sections at each grade level. Each grade is divided equally into four sections.

Classroom teachers work individually and in teams to teach a set standard curriculum: reading, math, science, health and safety, social studies, and language arts. In addition, both Drug Awareness Resistance Education (DARE) and instrumental music are offered. Three inclusion students are integrated throughout the grade levels.

Decisions concerning the implementation of the writing curriculum are left to the individual teacher's discretion. A wide variety of techniques are utilized, including whole language, writers workshop, Daily Oral Language (DOL), process writing, and language textbook lessons. Writing is done individually and in cooperative groups.

Surrounding Community School A

Unit school district A is located approximately 40 miles west of a large urban area and is composed of three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The district covers 25 square miles within one county and serves one rapidly growing community.

This middle class community is supported by a large range of employment classifications including manufacturing and retail trade. According to The United States Census Report (1990), the median household income for this area is $68,349 per year, with the median price of a home listed at $193,875.

Within school district A, the average teacher salary, as reported in The 1996 School Report Card, is $43,217, with an administrator salary of $71,369. The operating expenditure per pupil is $5,581, with the pupil-teacher ratio being 22.7:1.

The district has had the difficult task of constructing and drawing boundaries for a new elementary school and a new middle school to keep up with the rapidly growing community. Due to a five percent tax cap placed upon the school system, growth in enrollment has far exceeded the

funding increases, thus requiring the district to place before its voters a referendum for each new school. The referendum for the new middle school passed after two attempts, and the referendum for the new elementary school passed after one attempt. Another new elementary school is projected to be needed within the following year, with yet another elementary school the year after that. The redrawing of the district's boundaries with each added school is the cause of much concern throughout the community. Some students have alternated between two different grade schools, with further changes in the future. The increasing taxes and the repartitioning of the school district is cause for community unrest.

Immediate Problem Context School B

School B is an elementary school containing grades prekindergarten through sixth. The total enrollment is 1,286. The student ethnic background, as reported in the 1996 School Report Card, consists of 96.3% White, 1.2% Black, 1.8% Hispanic, 0.7% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.1% Native American. Three and one-tenth percent of the student population comes from low-income families, and none are limited-English-proficient (LEP). The school attendance rate is 95.9% with a 7.6% mobility rate.

The elementary school administrative staff is comprised of a full-time principal, a full-time assistant principal, and five secretaries. The instructional staff has 53 classroom teachers, and 28 special and support teachers provide services for vocal and instrumental music, physical

education, art, special education, gifted education, computer education, speech, remedial reading, health care, psychology, counseling, and social work. There are 16 classroom assistants, and a Learning Resource Specialist.

The faculty is 100% White with 15% male and 85% female. Within the staff, 43.7% of the teachers have a Bachelor's Degree, and 56.3% have a Master's Degree or above. The average teaching experience is 15.8 years (1996 School Report Card).

School B, located on 40 acres, is a one-story brick building constructed in 1976 as a middle school in a rural area (L. Albrecht, personal communication, May 16, 1996). The building houses 51 classrooms with an additional 5 detached double mobile units. There is also a learning center, a computer lab, and a two-level gymnasium. There are multiple sections of each grade level. There are two sections of preschool, eight sections of kindergarten through fifth, and seven sections of sixth grade.

Classroom teachers work individually and in teams to teach a set standard curriculum: reading, math, science, health and safety, social studies, and language arts. In addition, both Drug Awareness Resistance Education (DARE) and instrumental music are offered. Twelve inclusion students are integrated throughout the grade levels.

Decisions concerning the implementation of the writing curriculum are left to the individual teacher's discretion. A wide variety of

techniques are utilized, including whole language, writers workshop, Daily Oral Language (DOL), process writing, genre writing, and language textbook lessons. Writing is done individually and in cooperative groups.

Surrounding Community School B

Consolidated Unit School District B is located approximately 60 miles west of a large urban area and is composed of one elementary school, one combination middle/high school, and a career center. The district covers 140 square miles within one county and serves four small, yet rapidly growing, communities.

These middle class communities are supported by a narrow range of employment classifications, including farming and retail trade, with very few major industries. According to The United States Census Report (1990), the median household income for this area is $40,000 per year, with the prices of homes ranging from $80,000 to $500,000.

Within school district B, the average teacher salary, as reported in The 1996 School Report Card, is $40,216, with an administrator salary of $67,375. The operating expenditure per pupil is $4,838, with the pupil-teacher ratio being 21.5:1.

Overcrowding and financial cutbacks are two of the greatest problems faced by the district. By the year 2,000, the school district enrollment is forecast to be at 3,500 from its present 2,160. Due to a five percent tax cap placed upon the school system, growth in enrollment has far exceeded funding increases, thus requiring the district to place

frequent referenda before its voters. Although the citizens of the targeted communities are supporters of school activities, they have been slow to pass further tax increases. In the spring of 1995, they passed a 23 cent per hundred dollar of valuation increase in the education fund rate. A referendum to build two new elementary schools was placed on the ballot in February, 1997 and passed. The two new schools are scheduled for completion in August, 1998. They will house pre-kindergarten through fourth grade. Fifth through eighth grades will attend the district's refurbished middle school, thus eliminating overcrowding in both the elementary and the high school.

Immediate Problem Context School C

School C is an elementary school containing grades kindergarten through sixth. The total enrollment is 594. The student ethnic background, as reported in The 1996 School Report Card, consists of 59.1% White, 4.9% Black, 32.0% Hispanic, 3.9% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.2% Native American. Thirty-five percent of the student population comes from low-income families, and 30.1% are limited-English-proficient (LEP). The school attendance rate is 95.7% with a 31.2% mobility rate.

The elementary school administrative staff is comprised of a full-time principal, one secretary, and one bilingual liaison. The instructional staff has 20 classroom teachers, 5 of these being bilingual teachers, and 13 special and support teachers that provide services for vocal and instrumental music, physical education, art, special education, gifted

education, speech, health care, psychology, and social work. There are eight classroom assistants and a Learning Resource Specialist.

The faculty is 70% White and 30% Hispanic with 10% male and 90% female. Within the staff, 70% of the teachers have a Bachelor's Degree, and 30% have a Master's Degree or above. The average teaching experience is 16.2 years (1996 School Report Card).

School C, located on five acres, is a one-story brick building constructed in 1965 in a residential area. The building houses 18 classrooms with three detached mobile units. In addition, there is a learning center, a computer lab, and a gymnasium.

There are multiple sections at each grade level. There are two sessions of kindergarten, two regular and one bilingual first grades, and two regular and one bilingual second grades. At both the third and fourth grades, there are two regular and one bilingual classes. There are two regular classes each at grades five and six. In addition, there is a primary and an intermediate learning disabilities classroom.

Classroom teachers work individually and in teams to teach a set standard curriculum: reading, math, science, health and safety, social studies, and language arts. In addition, both Drug Awareness Resistance Education (DARE) and instrumental music are offered. One inclusion student is integrated into third grade.

Decisions concerning the implementation of the writing curriculum are left to the individual teacher's discretion. A wide variety of

techniques are utilized, including whole language, writers workshop, Daily Oral Language (DOL), process writing, and language textbook lessons. Writing is done individually and in cooperative groups.

Surrounding Community School C

Unit school district C is located approximately 40 miles northwest of a large urban area and is composed of 34 elementary schools, 6 middle schools, and 3 high schools. The district covers 90 square miles extending into three counties and serves six rapidly growing diverse communities.

These middle class communities are supported by a large range of employment classifications including manufacturing and retail trade. According to The United States Census Report (1990), the median household income for this area is $41,869 per year, with the median price of a home listed at $95,000.

Within school district C, the average teacher salary, as reported in The 1996 School Report Card, is $44,898, with an administrator salary of $70,216. The operating expenditure per pupil is $5,088, with the pupil-teacher ratio being 24.3:1.

Faced with exploding community growth, the district has had the difficult task of constructing new schools. After much debate, a tax referendum barely passed by three votes, enabling two new elementary schools to be built. Presently the district is establishing new boundary lines that will require some students to change schools. This is an issue that causes great concern throughout the community.

Regional and National Context of the Problem

Writing is becoming an increasingly important work skill, but many young students fail to develop good writing skills (Palar, 1995). Many educators are faced with students who can be creative thinkers and writers, but who cannot effectively communicate their thoughts. Compositions lack accuracy in spelling, punctuation, and other basic conventions. Following a nationwide study of 4th, 8th, and 11th grade students, The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported that most students simply do not write well (Palar, 1995).

Routman suggested that instructors are having difficulty applying the principles behind the whole language teaching methodology. They lack direction in teaching basic skills that are incorporated in a literature-based curriculum. Both parents and teachers are expressing concerns with the current writing programs and are re-examining the concept of "back to basics" (Routman, 1996).

In addition, the results of the 1993-1995 Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP) reflect current trends in student writing. The percentage of students who meet state goals has remained stable, therefore the levels of those who exceed state goals have not increased. This trend can be observed on a national level as well. The NAEP reports that test scores for reading and spelling have changed very little over the last two decades (Routman, 1996).

Instructors observe that there is little transfer from direct spelling instruction to application in student writing. Bodycott (1993) stated:

> I was left dismayed and bewildered when during writing, or composition as it was then called, students misspelled the very words they had triumphantly spelled correctly in their test. Something must have been very wrong - with them, with me, or with the spelling program. (p.216)

Many current spelling curricula are not tailored to individual student needs. Spelling is not simply memorization, drill, and practice, but a reflection of children's increasing understanding of sound-symbol relationship (Griffith & Leavell, 1995). Teachers are looking for approaches to spelling instruction that favor practices supporting a child's natural development of written language (Gill & Scharer, 1996).

Direct instruction in the mechanics of language is another area that displays minimal carryover. Misuse or non-use of appropriate conventions interferes with student ability to convey meaning. In 1995 Graves stated, "If we presume that children write to have an exchange of meaning, we can show them how their meaning is or isn't enhanced by conventions." (p.38) Student writing samples illustrate that proper mechanics are not utilized.

These problems pose a challenge for the educators of today. Administration mandates that the writing process is taught. Teachers are left with the burden of developing a program combining student creativity with basic writing skills which enables students to communicate well.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

Evidence supporting the lack of writing skills needed for effective communication was collected with both quantitative and qualitative measures. Data was gathered from the students in the targeted third and fourth grades, their parents, and other teachers in the buildings. Measurements that were used included teacher and parent surveys, student inventories that document poor writing skills, and assessments of student writing performance. Evidence from all these measures was gathered during the first two weeks of the school year.

Teacher survey

A teacher survey was created by the researchers so that the questions focused on writing instruction and student writing (Appendix A). The 47 completed teacher surveys, completed by elementary teachers at the three target schools, indicated a weakness in student writing skills. Eighty-one percent of the respondents replied that, generally, their students tended to be poor to average spellers. Sixty-four percent of the

teachers observed that students frequently asked the teacher when unable to spell a word, and 85 percent of the teachers observed that students frequently used inventive spelling when unable to spell a word. These results demonstrated an absence of a self-reliant attitude in the students. Teachers also reported that even when students presented a final draft, errors continued to appear mainly in spelling, punctuation, and run-on sentences. Overall, instructors cited the students' greatest weaknesses in writing were spelling, mechanics, and lack of supporting details. Indeed, most surveys reflected concerns about students' writing abilities. Refer to Appendix B for survey results.

Parent Survey

In addition to the teacher survey, the researchers created a parent survey about the school's writing program and the child's writing (Appendix C). Parents were sent an information letter (Appendix D) and a consent form (Appendix E). Eighty-four parent surveys were completed. Nineteen percent of parents responded that the school's writing program was ineffective for their child, and 23% felt that their child tended to be a poor speller. The parents' primary concerns about their child's writing skills were in the areas of spelling, mechanics, and writing in their second language. Moreover, 17% reported that their child never chooses to write during free time. Parent concerns closely mirrored those of the teachers that were surveyed. See Appendix F for complete survey results.

Writing and Spelling Inventories

At the beginning of the year, pupils of the targeted third and fourth grade classes took two writing inventories. In the bilingual classroom, the punctuation skill quiz was modified to accomodate the conventions of the Spanish - speaking students. A punctuation skill quiz, adapted from The Plain English Handbook as shown in Models of Curriculum-Based Assessment (1996), concentrated on the mechanics of writing (Appendix G). Students were most deficient in the areas of exclamation marks, quotation marks, colons, and apostrophes. See Appendix H for complete test results. The average score of all students combined was a 58%. Using 70% or better as a passing grade, twice as many students failed the punctuation quiz as those who passed it (Fiqure 1).

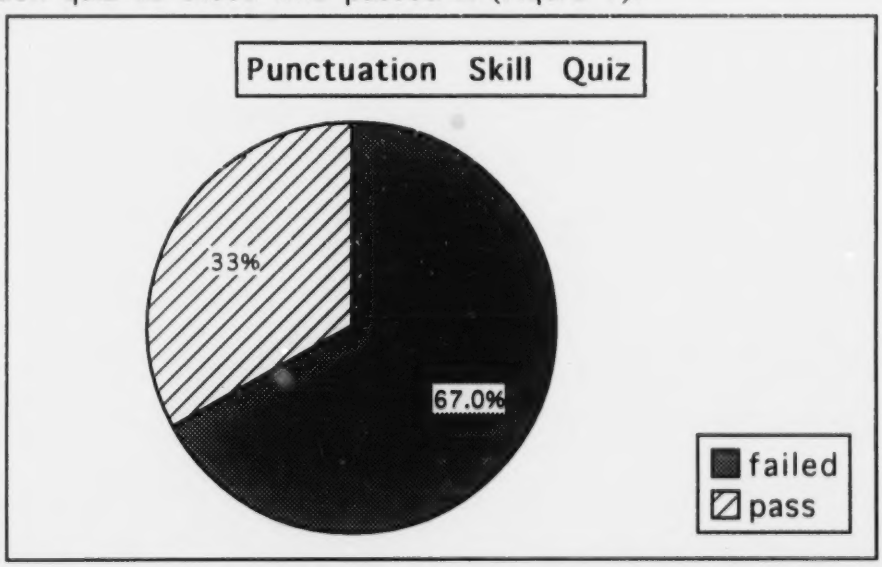

Figure 1 Percentages of Students Who Passed or Failed the Punctuation Skill Quiz, September, 1996

Students also took a teacher-created test, which focused on spelling (Appendix I). Like the punctuation skill test, many more students failed the spelling test than those who passed it (Figure 2). The results of these assessments indicated that there was significant room for improvement in student writing. See Appendix J for complete test results.

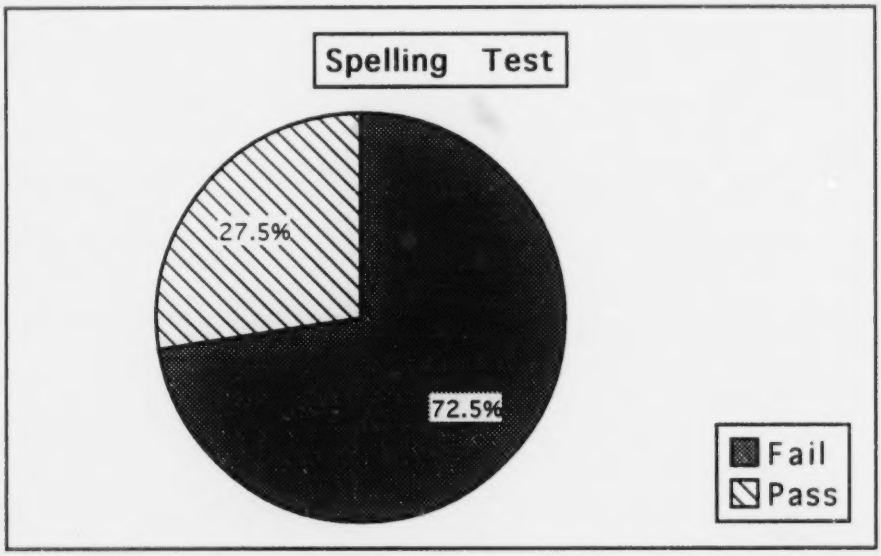

Figure 2 Percentages of Students Who Passed or Failed the Spelling Test, September, 1996

Writing prompt

To analyze the purposeful use of spelling and conventions in student writing, an IGAP paralleled writing prompt was administered in the first two weeks of school (Appendix K). The bilingual students were given the option of writing their responses to the prompt in either English or

Spanish. The prompt was assessed using a writing skills checklist/rubric that rated drafts as poor, weak, good, or excellent overall and in different categories (Appendix L). Forty-eight percent of students' papers rated a "poor" score overall. The students' weakest areas were in spelling, paragraph indenting, and the use of commas in a compound sentence. See Appendix M for complete test results.

IGAP

Upon analysis of IGAP writing scores, this trend toward low student writing performance is documented not only in these targeted classrooms, but throughout the state as well. From 1994 to 1995, the number of students that met state goals rose only one percent from 59% to 60%, and the number of students that exceeded state goals actually dropped from 28% to 26%. In addition, the state average on the IGAP writing section showed a decrease from 18.7 to 18.5. Writing skills have remained static in the last few years, instead of showing marked improvement.

Probable Causes - Sitebased

School A

Within the last year, School A has adopted a new spelling program. This non-traditional spelling system is not textbook-based and has caused uncertainty among the faculty. Because the teachers were unsure of the new program, many deviated from the program or abandoned spelling instruction altogether. Seventy-eight percent of the teachers felt that

their students were average spellers. In addition to incongruous spelling instruction, the writing program was also inconsistent. While 89% of the teachers felt confident about teaching writing, the scores of the students did not reflect this positive attitude. No prescribed writing program existed, so teachers developed their own. These programs varied in content, instructional time spent, and approach taken.

The content of the teachers' writing programs was very different. The results of the teachers' survey indicated that a broad range of material was being covered. Some teachers used writing only as an extension of other content areas. Others focused on communication of unrevised personal thoughts and ideas. The prime thrust of some teachers' instruction was IGAP-style writing only, while some ventured into alternative genres. Process writing was emphasized at times, and a few had a mechanics concentration only.

According to the survey, time spent in instruction was discrepant. Time spent teaching writing ranged from one hour to more than five hours per week, with four hours spent by the majority of the respondents. Therefore, some students had limited exposure to writing instruction, while others were overloaded.

Teachers used a variety of whole language strategies that yielded diverse results. Textbook lessons and whole-class instruction were used by many of the teachers. Writers workshop was included in some rooms.

School B

As with School A, School B's spelling program was ineffective. The results of the teacher survey showed that 43% of the teachers considered their students to be poor spellers. No consistent writing program existed, therefore students were exposed to erratic writing experiences. The discrepancies of the writing program in School B corresponded to the discrepancies of the writing program in School A. Because these instructional styles were so different, parents were at a loss when trying to help their children. In addition, teachers experienced difficulty meeting the needs of students due to overcrowded classrooms, as mentioned in Chapter One.

School C

Like School B, the teachers of School C regarded their spelling program as ineffective. Some teachers had chosen to use other spelling materials in place of the established program. Regardless of which materials were used, 53% of the teachers felt that their students were poor spellers. Worse yet, the bilingual classrooms had no existing spelling program at all. The acquisition of English as a second language was inhibited by the lack of spelling materials.

Similar to Schools A and B, School C's writing program was inconsistent in content, instructional time, and approach. School C also had a high population of ESL students. As bilingual students, they

experienced difficulty mastering basic components of English as a second language, let alone learning the nuances of a new written language. Because the parents were often immigrants, some of them could neither read nor write English. Consequently, the students had no help with homework and no exposure to print in their second language. Furthermore, low socioeconomic status limited access to enriching life experiences for 35% of the pupils.

Probable Causes - A Review of the Literature

Glazer states that as a nation, we are becoming more aware of and concerned with appearances. This interest carries over into the way we look at writing (Glazer, 1994). Students' writing, more and more often, is illegible, sloppy, and filled with misspellings of basic words (Routman, 1993). According to the literature, a variety of probable causes exists for these major deficiencies in writing skills.

One reason that student writing is poor could be that students lack ownership and involvement. According to Invernizzi and Abouzeid (1994), students should be given the chance to examine, manipulate, and make decisions about words. When students are actively engaged in their own writing, they feel a sense of trust and independence (Opitz & Cooper, 1993). This role of ownership is critical to the development of an emerging writer. As Harste (1986) stated it in Lewin (1992), "...students change from tenants of our own text to owners of their own text." (p. 586)

Opportunity must be given to children so they can implement what they've learned about writing. Experience is the best teacher, and too often, that experience is not readily available to children.

Students are not the only ones who need knowledge; indeed, teachers need sufficient background knowledge to conduct successful lessons (McCleary, 1995). Although there has been research on the characteristics on effective spelling instruction, many teachers are not aware of these findings (Johnson, Langfor, & Quorn, 1981). According to Templeton (1991), the teachers that are aware of these characteristics are uncertain of how and when to use them effectively. Graves (1995) added,

> Twenty four of our states don't even offer a course of writing for a teacher-in-training to take....There is so little opportunity to be well-prepared to teach writing, yet administrators continually mandate the writing process approach without realizing that much help is needed for the faculty. (pp. 42, 43)

The teacher interpretation of whole language de-emphasizes basic skills instruction. Routman (1993) stated, "Too many well-intentioned teachers have been operating under the assumption that in a whole language classroom they are not allowed to interfere with children's writing." (p. 37) Because teachers were concerned with children's fluency and creativity, basic skill instruction was neglected. Yet Strickland (1995) states that using the whole language approach should not involve

the abandonment of the basics. And if teachers do want to include basic skills in their instruction, they can be faced with an inherent mismatch between skill-oriented materials and a whole language philosophy.

Poor student writing could also be attributed to overcrowding and time constraints within the classroom. Kellow (1993) suggested that because of the number of students in our classrooms, teachers can not attend effectively to the specific writing development of each individual student. Moreover, teachers do not have enough time to teach writing. It's hard to fit writing instruction between everything else that teachers are required to do. Writing instruction and assessment, especially, is time-consuming because of the feedback that must be given (Palar, 1995).

A further explanation for declining writing skills could be that students' developmental stages are often ignored. Indeed, children are often placed in a learning program by age rather than considering individual rates of orthographic maturation. According to Griffith and Leavell (1995), "Children's study of written language varies with their level of sophistication because children at different stages of spelling development focus on different types of information when they look at words." (p. 86) Spelling instruction should be tailored to fit individual's readiness because children develop through a process of learning stages (French, 1994).

If the developmental stages are ignored, students are forced to rely on rote memory. Rote memory is a dominant teaching method in schools across the United States, yet this strategy is often unsuccessful. Novelli (1993) expressed the concern that many teachers have experienced. Students learn isolated skills for the moment, but those skills, left unapplied, are soon lost. Students do not place importance on skills taught out of context.

The importance of print immersion is another consideration. Children who are not exposed to large quantities of written language tend to not develop an awareness of language rules and conventional spelling. Word pattern knowledge develops through exposure to print in both reading and writing activities (Griffith & Leavell,1995). Manning and Manning (1994) believed, "...if students are to explore written language as writers, they must be saturated in literature as readers." (p. 59)

In conclusion, the evidence suggests that the following causes are the primary reasons for the deficiencies in standard writing skills:

1. new or ineffective spelling programs
2. no consistent writing program
3. parent confusion regarding whole language philosophy
4. prevalent English as a Second Language (ESL)
5. low socioeconomic status
6. lack of ownership and involvement by students

7. teachers deficient in background knowledge
8. teacher misinterpretation of whole langage philosophy
9. individual instruction prohibited by time and class size
10. ignoring individual student's developmental stages
11. rote memory and out-of-context instruction
12. lack of print immersion

CHAPTER 3

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Literature Review

New insights into writing instruction have brought theory and practice closer together. Nevertheless, while some strides have been made in balancing a skills orientation with a whole language philosophy, teachers are still faced with uncertainty as to blending the two successfully. In their enthusiasm for the benefits of whole language, educators have embraced this student-centered approach to writing. In consequence, the basics needed for effective communication have been abandoned. While their ideas are expressed beautifully, students' final products remain unpolished and difficult to read. "Elevating process has driven out standards" (MacDonald, 1995, p. 5).

An appropriate writing program must be built upon existing research allowing for freedom of innovation. There are a variety of tools a teacher may choose to use to achieve high standards. An examination of current literature reveals several possible solution strategies: cooperative learning, writers workshop, a whole language philosophy, active writing, direct spelling and skill instruction, parental help, developmental

instruction, and self-assessment.

Cooperative learning methods could be utilized to achieve those high writing standards. Strickland (1995) saw the value of cooperative learning in a writing classroom. "Reading and writing are social processes, dynamic and interactive. They involve making decisions and solving problems, much of which occurs through constructive interaction with others." (p. 299) Students working collaboratively have time to talk with others, and the interaction promotes insights into word relations and develops positive attitudes. Working together, students gain awareness of themselves as competent word users and spellers (Gentry & Gillet, 1993).

The social and analytical skills gained in cooperative learning are invaluable during writers workshop. Words and skills become meaningful and fully incorporated when students use them as a purposeful part of the writing process (Bloodgood, 1991). Writers workshop provides the format for effective communication. Focusing on a student's personal development, instructors seize theteachable moment to address individual needs. Skills and strategies are presented in mini-lessons, teacher conferences, and peer conferences.

As the teacher becomes the student's audience, the focus shifts to the student as creator and writer. By taking more responsibility, pupils generate, monitor, and revise their own writing. Students are expected to identify their errors, then employ learned strategies to correct them. "We must hold kids accountable for basic standards so they can take pride in

their work." (Routman, 1993, p. 37)

Proper spelling in a final draft reflects the pride a student takes in his work. Good spelling is not always innate; meaningful instruction is a necessary element of real learning. The content of the spelling program should focus on three components: high frequency words, individualized words, and word studies.

Routman (1996) felt that it is fair to assume that children can spell high frequency words correctly whenever they write. High frequency words are those that are used most often. When high frequency words are spelled correctly, the clarity of the piece is improved.

In addition to high frequency words, another element of the spelling program should include individualized words. Students choose misspelled words from their own writing that are purposeful for self-expression. Then they are motivated to learn and use the words instead of memorizing them for a test.

Word studies provide students with opportunities to examine words for the purpose of identifying relationships, patterns, and meanings. Words that illustrate relationships and patterns should be part of a spelling list. Adams (1990), cited in Cunningham and Hall (1994), suggested that the brain detects patterns rather than applies rules. He believes that decoding a word happens when a familiar spelling pattern is recognized. If the pattern is unfamiliar, the brain searches through its store of similar-patterned words. In addition, a portion of every spelling

list should include words based on current content or area of study. Within a content unit, some low-utility words become words of high utility. "While words such as triceratops, brontosaurus, and iguanadon may have low utility among the general population, they may have high utility within a class which has discovered the delight and fascination of dinosaurs." (Johnson et al., 1981, p. 584)

These word studies are often embedded in a whole language unit. An effective teacher uses a comprehensive approach to teaching word analysis that includes print immersion, focused word study, and writing. Direct instruction is integrated into a more holistic reading and writing program. Learning in this way is meaningful and purposeful to the student rather than learning through decontextualized drill (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1993).

Writing is an integral part of whole language because it connects students to purposeful communication, to the love of words, and to the knowledge of what words can do (Booth, 1994). When students use writing as a tool for self-expression and the topic matters to them, they are willing to work hard to communicate their thoughts. Indeed, writing is one of the best tools for learning any material because it activates thinking (Zemelman et al., 1993). Writing serves students because it deepens their engagement with the curriculum.

Yet for many students, active writing is not enough; some require direct spelling and skill instruction. Spelling and mechanics are the tools

that help pupils communicate their thoughts clearly. The purpose of using correct spelling and conventions is so that writing becomes easier, more fluid, more expressive, and more easily read and understood by an audience (Gentry & Gillet, 1993). Writing is valued most and used more when it is part of other learning activities.

Writing is not exclusive to school. Parents are children's first and most influential teachers. Home should be a place where writing is encouraged. Parents can support writing by using it for real purposes - grocery lists, messages, letters, and invitations (Fischer & Fischer, 1992). Students learn best holistically, when exposed to real-world text. As well as engaging students in family-based writing experiences, parents can also extend their involvement into the child's classroom. Parents can become in-class writing coaches, audiences, and publishing assistants. In this way parents play an active role in their children's development as writers.

Both parents and teachers should acknowledge the developmental nature of a child's educational experiences. As in other subjects, this belief extends to writing, especially the acquisition of spelling and the skills of written language. Language arts instruction should be timed to complement a child's instructional level. By teaching to the instructional level, teachers enable students to utilize background knowledge and progress logically through their developmental stages. Regarding spelling, Routman (as cited in French, 1994) said:

> Whole language teachers seek to build the spelling memory base primarily by giving students plenty of opportunity to read, write, use, and talk about words. At the appropriate level, usually second grade, teachers begin to add mini-lessons designed to teach a few consistent rules about spelling, word patterns, and unusual features of words. (p. 20)

Templeton (1991) reiterated this idea when he said that students organize and apply knowledge about words in different ways at different times.

When students are developmentally ready, they can take responsibility for self-examination and correction. "Self-correction by the learner is the single most influential variable affecting learning to spell." (Johnson et al., 1981, p. 584) Gentry and Gillet (1993) favored self-assessment strategies that allowed pupils to set appropriate goals and monitor their own growth.

One additional benefit of self-assessment is that pupils can help each other. Critiquing one's own work leads to improvement in the review of others' work in a positive constructive manner. It is the teacher's responsibility to model appropriate content and mechanical assessment in the editing stage of the writing process. Self-involvement in evaluation helps students make discoveries about their abilities to communicate with words. "...we hope to create in our students an awareness that they must be the instigators and assessors of their own intellectual growth and development." (Glazer, 1994, p. 106)

Project Outcomes

The examination of research regarding student writing suggests the need for a plan of action that addresses students' spelling and writing convention development in order to improve the effectiveness of student written communication. Therefore:

> As a result of increased instructional emphasis on spelling during the period of August 1996 to February 1997, the third and fourth grade students from the targeted classes will improve their ability to use accurate spelling in their writing, as measured by a spelling inventory and a writing prompt assessment.
>
> As a result of increased instructional emphasis on writing conventions during the period of August 1996 to February 1997, the third and fourth grade students from the targeted classes will improve their ability to use accurate conventions in their writing, as measured by a writing inventory and a writing prompt assessment.

In order to accomplish the terminal objective, the following processes will be implemented:

1. Teachers will incorporate cooperative learning strategies into the language curriculum to enhance students' writing skills.

2. Teachers will implement writers workshop to increase students' use of accurate conventions and spelling in written work.

3. Teachers will develop and implement a spelling program that will include high frequency words, individual words, and word studies.

4. Teachers will provide a language-rich environment through the use of whole-language philosophy.

PROJECT ACTION PLAN

During the first two weeks of the school year teachers will gather problem evidence and inform parents by:

sending parent letter

administering parent survey

administering teacher survey

administering spelling inventory

administering writing inventory

administering writing prompt

Teachers will incorporate cooperative learning strategies into the language curriculum to enhance students' writing skills.

I. cooperative group introduction- (first two weeks, 7 lessons, 45 min. each) group building & social skills

- Acrostic Group Name
- bracelet making
- Teamwork (looks like, sounds like,...)
- That's a Good Idea
- Get the Beat
- Broken Squares and Circles
- Sculptor

II. cooperative writing activities (17 weeks, once a week, 45 min. each)

- Class Rules
- "Where in the World?" postcards
- Favorite Things List
- group to group letters
- Oobleck (Halloween)
- persuasive campaign posters
- write a letter to Santa as a historical person
- "I Have a Dream"
- The Feet of Michael Jordan
- February Dialogue Hearts
- Recipe of Love Potion (witch's brew, etc.)
- Laura's Problem
- Letter Home from Travels
- diamante
- Describe a Meal
- Scent Stories
- Story from a Box Cover

III. cooperative Daily Oral Language (20 weeks, daily, 15 min. each)

- daily practice Monday-Thursday

  *individual corrections

  *group corrections

*class corrections & discussion

*pop-in-class reward system

- assessment on Friday

*quiz over a sentence(s) from that week

*to be used as a grade

Teachers will implement writers workshop to increase students' use of accurate conventions and spelling in written work.

IV. writers workshop introduction (second week, 3 days)

- student behaviors during writers workshop

*come prepared to write everyday

*work at your writing- make every moment count

*move through all steps of the writing process

*do not do anything that might disturb anyone in the class

*conferencing

around outside edges of room

no interruptions of student and teacher conferences

low volume

use another color for revising and editing

suggestions only

kind comments

initial paper after revising and editing

- working portfolio

  *current works in progress

- final portfolio (to be done quarterly)

  *student tagging

  *student reflection

  *parent survey

- writing process steps

  *status of the class

  *status of the student

  *prewrite, draft, revise, edit, final draft

  "prepare, first dare, repair, share"

  *publishing

  *modeling by teacher

V. writers workshop

- writing time (18 weeks, 3-4 per week, 40 min. each)
- mini-lessons (18 weeks, 2-3 per week, 10 min. each)

  *focus sheets/prewriting

  Share an Experience

  Brainstorming

  *contractions

  *genres

  *descriptive writing

The Five Senses

*persuasive, narrative, expository

Draw a Life Map

Pros and Cons T-chart

Story Map

5 Ws

*showing, not telling

Show Me

*paragraphing

Those are the Breaks

*quotations

Speech Bubbles

Using Our Noodles

Historical Dialogue

*apostrophe

T-chart

Who's Ladder

*period

Proof Reader's Guide

U. R. Terrific

Hungry Mungry Monkey

*comma

A Catfish is Smooth, Shiny, and Slippery

*complete sentences

Run-ons and Fragments

*colon

Having Fun

*subject and predicate

Sentence Strips

*combining sentences

And Then...

*Language Catch

*Punctuate Properly

*Signs for the Times

*Practices I-VI

*Additional activities supplemented by Language texts

Teachers will develop and implement a spelling program that will include high frequency words, individual words, and word studies.

VI. spelling program introduction (second week, 1 day)

- high frequency words
- basic spelling skills
- individualized word lists

VII. spelling program

- high frequency words (18 weeks, all the time)

  *references for students

  alphabet wall

  Quick Word

  desk sheet

- basic spelling skills (18 weeks, 2-3 per week, 20 min. each)

  *mini-lessons & activities

  Making Big Words

  T-charts

  Language Experience

  Spelling Free Choice

  Irregular Plurals

  Stack a Sandwich

  Guess My Rule

  Error Story

  Spelling Beach Ball

  Compound Words

  Sponge Ball Baseball

  pulling from literature

  patterning

  categorizing

  sorting

  rhyming

  crossword puzzles

  Brainstorm Race

  Spelling Football

  Spelling Bingo

  Lima Beans

- individualized lists (17 weeks, 2-3 per week, 20 min. each)

  *5 student generated words from writing

*5 teacher generated words from skills or literature

*unit schedule

Have a Go

independent study

games, activities

review

- peer test
- self-correct
- percentage grade
- wrap to next week for missed words

Teachers will provide a language-rich environment through the use of whole-language philosophy.

VIII. whole language (20 weeks, daily)

- response to authors
- print immersion
- literature circles
- novel studies
- independent reading study
- learning logs (1-2 per week,15 min.)
- journaling (1-2 per week,15 min.)
- dictation (once a week, 10 min.)
- SSR (daily, 15-20 min.)

- responsive writing to literature

During the second and third week of February, teachers will gather post-intervention information by:

administering parent survey

administering spelling inventory

administering writing inventory

administering writing prompt

Methods of Assessment

To determine the effectiveness of the intervention, the following methods of assessment will be used by the researchers:

1. Teacher survey (A) - September
2. Parent survey (C) - September, February
3. Writing inventory (G) - September, February
4. Spelling inventory (I) - September, February
5. Writing prompt (K) - September, February

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of Intervention

The objective of this action plan addressed the written communication skills of the targeted third and fourth grade groups. As a result of increased instructional emphasis on spelling during the period of August 1996 to February 1997, the third and fourth grade students from the targeted classed will improve their abilitiy to use accurate spelling in their writing, as measured by a spelling inventory and a writing prompt assessment.

As a result of increased instructional emphasis on writing conventions during the period of August 1996 to February 1997, the third and fourth grade students from the targeted classes will improve their ability to use accurate conventions in their writing, as measured by a writing inventory and a writing prompt assessment. Research, surveys, student writing samples and teacher observations were used to assess the results of this action research project.

Analysis of the pretest results showed the need for improvement in students' written communication skills. A whole language environment,

implementation of cooperative learning strategies, writers workshop and an innovative spelling program were selected to effect the desired changes.

These action project components were implemented in three different school buildings. The targeted classrooms included one bilingual fourth grade, two regular fourth grades, and one third grade. Though the makeup of the students and the curriculum content varied, all four classrooms followed the same basic pattern of presentation and practice.

Cooperative strategies were introduced during the first two weeks of the school year to promote group building and social skills. Seven forty-five minute lessons presented specific socialization techniques to be practiced by the students. Over the course of this program pupils were taught to listen to each other, accept others' ideas, and to work as a team.

Those group skills were an essential component of the cooperative writing activities that followed. For the duration of the intervention, students worked both individually and in teams to practice the writing process. Students were immersed in brainstorming, drafting, editing, and sharing their final products. Specifically, when practicing DOL editing, the bilingual classroom corrected one sentence in English and one sentence in Spanish.

Writers workshop was another facet used throughout the course of this intervention. Three times a week, students sharpened their

writing skills with the use of instructional mini-lessons and time alloted for writing practice. The choice was given to the bilingual students to write in the language of their preference.

In the mini-lessons the mechanics of writing were presented. The fourth grade bilingual classroom had some lessons presented in the students' native language, while others were presented in their second language. Included were: contractions, quotations, apostrophes, periods, commas, and colons. Other components of writing were also addressed. Writing genres, styles, sentence structure, and paragraphing were taught. Students were given the opportunity to practice these skills repeatedly during writing time.

In conjunction with writers workshop, a three part spelling program was developed to enhance the connection between spelling and writing. The spelling program focused on high frequency words, student chosen words, and word studies. In each classroom, a high frequency word wall was created to raise awareness of correct spelling. Emphasis was placed on these words by assessing random writing samples. Through the context of their own writing, students chose and studied words that held meaning for each of them as individuals. Instructional time was given to develop students' abilities in detection of word patterns.

The whole language philosophy provided the umbrella in which all of these components were taught. Students functioning in a language rich environment met and explored words in a purposeful context.

This approach supported students in their efforts to become effective communicators.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

Upon completion of the intervention, qualitative and quantitative evaluations were again administered to determine the effectiveness of the program. This post-intervention information was gathered at the end of February. Measurements that were used included parent surveys, student inventories that documented students writing skills, and assessements of student writing performance.

Parent Survey

In order to get a better understanding of parent views on writing instruction, the same survey sent to parents in September was readministered at the end of February. Fifty surveys were returned. Ninety-six percent of the parents felt the writing program was effective, a 15% increase from September. While the parents showed that they felt more confident in the effectiveness of the writing program, they continued to express the same concerns about spelling and mechanics. However, fewer parents felt that their children were poor spellers. The September survey showed that 23% were dissatisfied with their children's spelling abilities, while the last survey revealed that only 4% shared that concern. Additionally, parents of bilingual students expressed great satisfaction that opportunities were provided for the children to write in their second language. See Appendix N for complete results.

Writing and Spelling Inventories

The same two writing inventories, given to the students in September, were readministered at the end of February. The punctuation skill quiz (Appendix G) was adapted from The Plain English Handbook as shown in Models of Curriculum-Based Assessment (1996). The previous skill quiz score had an average of 58%, while the recent score was 78%. This reflects a 20% improvement from September to February. In contrast to the 33% who passed at the beginning of the year, 79% passed at the conclusion of the intervention (Figures 3 and 4).

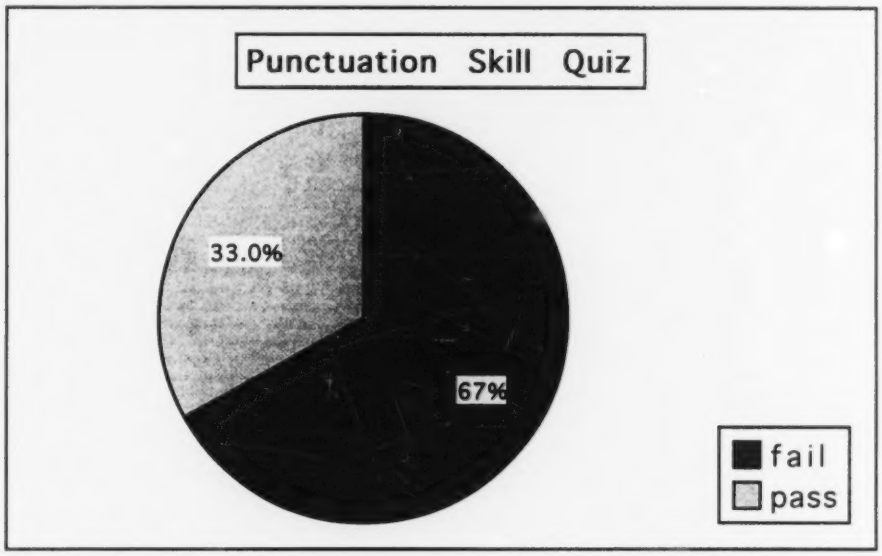

Figure 3 Percentages of Students Who Passed or Failed the Punctuation Skill Quiz, September, 1996

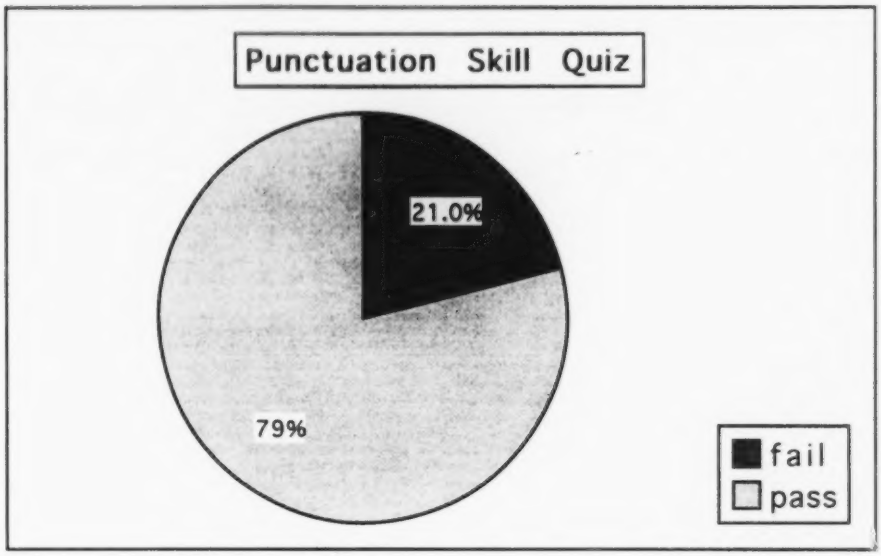

Figure 4 Percentages of Students Who Passed or Failed the Punctuation Skill Quiz, February, 1997

The results of this quiz showed student improvement in the mechanics of writing. Each school showed marked improvement in overall percentages scored (Appendix H). Especially significant was the overall growth in previously deficient areas. Colon usage improved by 13%. The use of quotation marks improved by 31%. There was a 39% increase in the correct use of apostrophes, and the use of exclamation points improved by 52%. Looking at individual schools, there was also improvement in scores. No matter whether English-speaking or bilingual, the students in each classroom demonstrated dramatic growth in their abilities to punctuate sentences properly (Appendix O).

Students also retook a teacher created test, which focused on spelling (Appendix I). A score of 70% or better was considered passing. Twenty percent more students passed the second time the assessment was taken than the first time it was taken (Figures 5 and 6). Of all students involved in the program, a vast majority showed growth in spelling from September to February (Appendix J). Comparing results from September to February, each classroom's scores raised considerably (Appendix P).

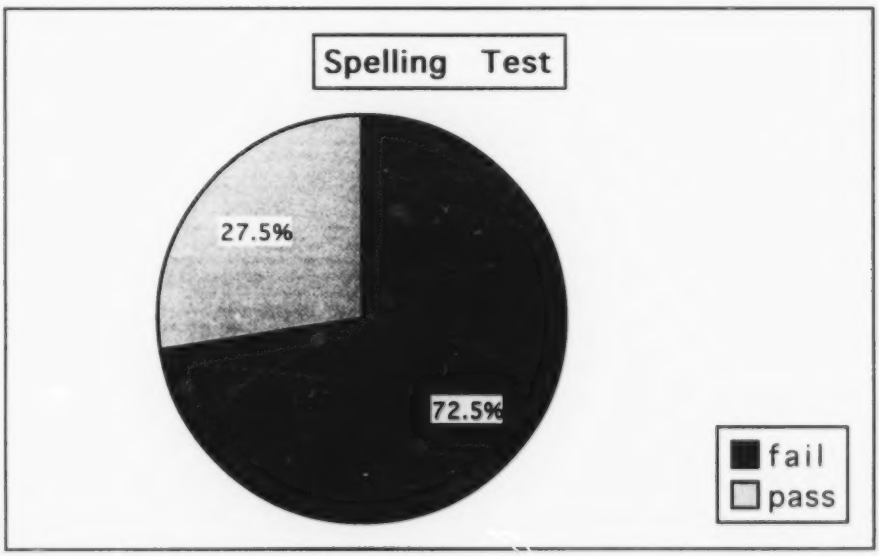

Figure 5 Percentages of Students Who Passed or Failed the Spelling Test, September, 1996

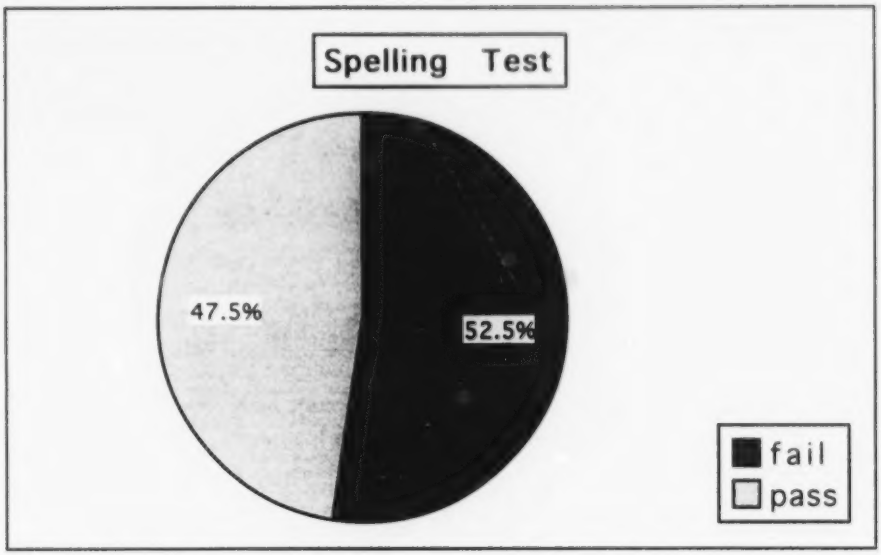

Figure 6 Percentages of Students Who Passed or Failed the Spelling Test, February, 1997

Writing Prompt

To analyze the purposeful use of spelling and conventions in student writing, an IGAP paralleled writing prompt was readministered in the last two weeks of February (Appendix K). The prompt was assessed using a writing skills checklist/rubric that rated drafts as poor, weak, good, or excellent overall and in different categories (Appendix L). Twenty percent of students' papers rated a "poor" score overall, in contrast to the 48 percent that scored "poor" on the prior survey. Analysis of the rubrics showed two areas of improvement. First, there was a definite increase in the numbers of papers that were rated "good" or "excellent." Second, more students attempted to use a greater variety of advanced writing

skills. Students moved from creating simple sentences to forming more sophisticated, complicated sentences. They attempted more frequent use of capitals, periods, commas, and paragraph indentation. Not only were the sentences more complex, the compositions were better supported and developed. See Appendix Q for complete results.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The six month intervention focused on the four following main objectives to improve student writing:

1. Teachers will incorporate cooperative learning strategies into the language curriculum to enhance students' writing skills.

2. Teachers will implement writers workshop to increase students' use of accurate conventions and spelling in written work.

3. Teachers will develop and implement a spelling program that will include high frequency words, individual words, and word studies.

4. Teachers will provide a language-rich environment through the use of whole language philosophy.

Overall, the entire intervention was thought to be quite successful. Students grew as writers and communicators by writing and working together. The first intervention objective, cooperative learning, was used to encourage the social skills necessary to build a language-rich environment. As teachers, it is strongly believed that social skills should be taught at school. Good social skills are a basic life skill and an integral part of learning. With good team skills, students were able to co-

write, reflect, revise, edit, listen, and respond in an appropriate and positive manner. Being an interactive audience promoted student awareness of quality, variety, and accuracy of writing. This experience provided models of what a good piece of writing looked and sounded like. Helping others enabled pupils to improve their own writing.

Upon reflection, all three sites experienced positive results through the use of cooperative learning. The program would not have been the success it was had the students not felt comfortable in taking risks. Therefore, all four instructors feel that this is an essential component of a complete writing program and will include it in the years to come.

Cooperative DOL was a successful part of our intervention. It practices the importance of good social skills in combination with learning the mechanics of writing. Both individual and group skills were utitilized. The program allowed the individual student to use and assess their own knowledge. Each individual then contributed to the group in an effort to come to consensus with one accurately corrected final product. The students' transfer of these skills in their writing and editing were an obvious sign of application and the program's success.

This original approach to teaching the mechanics of writing was enjoyed by both instructors and learners. All four teachers will continue to use this method because it includes social skills while teaching the mechanics of writing. Being student directed, this procedure empowered the students by lessening teacher leadership. The students' willing

involvement cultivated more active learning and interest. Thinking of it as a game made it fun for them, and at the same time it helped them become better editors. This aspect of the intervention could easily be taught to other teachers and used in the classrooms.

The original objective of writers workshop was to build precision in student communication. It utilized the writing process from brainstorming through the final product. It provided continued daily practice in written communication. To improve clarity, teachers taught mini-lessons to meet the immediate needs of all students. Beyond the original objective, writers workshop accomplished more than anticipated. Student ownership and subsequent involvement were sure signs of improvement and success with their writing. Because students had individual topic choice, writing time became a pleasurable experience that held meaning for them. Each writer was allowed to develop at his own pace. Through positive social interaction students became risk-takers as they shared their writing with each other. The bilingual students, especially, gained knowledge and confidence in dealing with their second language.

Previous inexperience with writers workshop was replaced with teacher confidence through this year's experience. Because students gained so much more than ever anticipated, all four instructors are committed to teaching writing composition and mechanics through writers workshop. For future writing instruction, teachers will use

writers workshop as the framework for the successful teaching of writing skills. It is recommended that writers workshop become a unified program used throughout all grade levels. Discussing the program with peers would enable teachers to sharpen and refine the organization and structure of this technique.

The spelling portion of the interaction had three components: high frequency words, mini-lessons, and individualized spelling lists. Two of the three elements worked well in the classrooms. Focusing on high frequency words developed an awareness in the learners. This spelling conscience showed them the importance of spelling during writing. The improved clarity of their written message was then more easily understood by an audience.

Although spelling is developmental, some students require direct spelling instruction. The instructors designed and used mini-lessons to teach consistent rules about spelling, word patterns, and unusual features of words. Students began to apply these rules in both their reading and writing. When editing, the students recognized their own errors and used logical patterns to attempt to correct them.

The third component consisted of individualized spelling lists created by the students themselves. The goal was for students to choose misspelled words from their own writing that were purposeful for self-expression. The teachers had hoped that this would motivate the students to learn and use the words instead of memorizing them for a test.

Unfortunately, this concept met with poor results. Students remained uninvolved and unwilling to choose purposeful words that would enhance their writing. Instead, they made hasty and careless choices of words that held little meaning in their writing. It also appeared that little effort was made to spell these words correctly when errors were continually repeated.

Significant growth did occurr in the areas of high frequency spelling and the use of predictable spelling rules. Because of this, all four teachers will continue to implement these two facets of the program. The individualized word lists will be abandoned because they have proven to hold no meaning to the students. The spelling portion of this intervention will be shared as other teachers have expressed interest in it. This could lead to a standardization of spelling instruction within a building and possibly a district.

Much of the writing done during the intervention was imbedded in a whole language environment. In this type of classroom, students prospered as writers because their writing became a useful tool for active learning. Students became better able to clarify and articulate their thoughts. They engaged their writing skills within all subject areas. Writing was no longer a subject in and of itself.

Whole language came to life in these classrooms as teachers gained a deeper understanding of the concept. It was no longer a nebulous term and therefore more easily utilized in the classrooms. Without hesitation,

teachers agree that this format should be retained for use in the future.

Indeed, through the intervention, students became better communicators. Final drafts were polished, reflecting an internalization of both process and product. As the students became competent, confident writers, teachers felt a genuine sense of pride. Also, portions of the research were of interest to many other teachers within the targeted schools. They expressed interest in the high frequency word wall, the cooperative DOL, and certain aspects of writers workshop. Many of them plan to implement those parts in their own classrooms. Due to the overall success of this program, teachers will most assuredly incorporate it into all future instruction.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Teacher Survey
September, 1996

TEACHER SURVEY

As part of of our master's program through St. Xavier University, our group is conducting a voluntary survey regarding teachers' experiences with writing instruction. Please take a moment to complete this confidential survey and return it to _____ by _____.

1. The teachers in our school follow a consistent and unified writing program across the grade levels.
   always sometimes never

2. I use this method of teaching writing most frequently:
   a. textbook lessons b. writer's workshop
   c. whole-class instruction d. other: _____
   (please specify)

3. I spend approximately _____ hours per week in writing instruction.
   0 1 2 3 4 5 more than 5

4. I feel confident about my ability to teach writing.
   strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

5. In writing, I think that content is more important than mechanics.
   strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

6. In general, my students tend to be spellers that are:
   excellent good average poor

7. Circle all that apply.
   Most frequently, when my students cannot spell a word, I see them:

   use a dictionary or spelling ace ask a friend
   ask a teacher omit the word use invented spelling

8. Circle three.

Most often, when my students present a final draft paper, I continue to see errors in these areas:

spelling	run-ons	sentence variety
paragraphing	punctuation	incomplete sentences
capitalization	tense	noun/verb agreement
other _____ (please specify)		

9. When you teach writing, what do you teach?

_____

_____

_____

_____

10. In general, my students' greatest weakness in writing is:

_____

_____

_____

_____

11. In our school environment, what do you think are the primary causes of the above weakness?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for your help!

Appendix B
Teacher Survey Results
September, 1996

Response: Number/Percentage							
1. The teachers in our school follow a consistent and unified writing program across the grade levels.							
	always	sometimes	never				
	4	34	8				
	9%	72%	17%				
2. In general, my students tend to be spellers that are:							
	excellent	good	average	poor			
	1	6	24	16			
	2%	13%	51%	34%			
3. I use this method of teaching writing most frequently:							
	textbook	workshop	class instruction				
	9	29	25				
	19%	29%	53%				
4. I feel confident about my ability to teach writing.							
	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree			
	10	31	5	1			
	21%	66%	11%	2%			
5. In writing, I think that content is more important than mechanics.							
	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree			
	5	31	11	1			
	11%	66%	23%	2%			
6. Most frequently, when my students cannot spell a word, I see them:							
	dictionary	ask teacher	omit word	ask friend	invented		
	17	31	2	19	40		
	36%	66%	4%	40%	85%		
7. I spend approximately ____ hours per week in writing instruction.							
	0 hours	1 hour	2 hours	3 hours	4 hours	5 hours	more than
	3	5	11	14	2	6	7
	6%	11%	23%	30%	4%	13%	15%
8. Most often, when my students present a final draft paper, I continue to see errors in these areas:							
	spelling	punctuation	run-ons	sentence variety	incomplete sentences	paragraphing	capitalization
	32	29	22	9	17	16	14
	68%	62%	47%	19%	36%	34%	30%
9. When you teach writing, what do you teach?							
	mechanics	writing process					
	20	15					
	43%	32%					

Appendix B
Teacher Survey Results
September, 1996

10 In general, my students' greatest weakness in writing is:								
	mechanics	process writing						
	16	14						
	34%	30%						

11 In our school environment, what do you think are the primary causes of the above weakness?								
	time	development						
	10	8						
	21%	17%						

Appendix C
Parent Survey
September, 1996 and February, 1997

PARENT SURVEY

In order to get a better understanding of your views on writing instruction, I am conducting a voluntary, confidential survey. Please take a moment to complete this important questionnaire and return it by _____ .

1. My school's writing program is effective for my child.

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

2. My child understands the writing process.

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

3. The teachers in our school follow a consistent and unified writing program across the grade levels.

always sometimes never

4. During free time, my child chooses to write.

always sometimes never

5. In writing, I think ideas are more important than spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

Appendix C
Parent Survey
September, 1996 and February, 1997

6. In general, my child tends to be a/an _____ speller.

excellent good average poor

7. I would be comfortable helping my child with spelling.

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

8. I would be comfortable helping my child with writing.

strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree

9. In general, my primary concerns about my child's writing skills are:

_____

_____

_____

_____

10. Teachers in school could help my child's writing by:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for your help!

Appendix D
Parent Information Letter
September, 1996

Dear Parent,

This year I am participating in a Master's program focusing on effective student communication through writing. It should be an exciting year because your child should benefit from many new ideas and activities. Cooperative learning, writers workshop, spelling, and whole language will be the foundation of our language arts program.

You can help your child at home by insuring the use of high frequency word lists during all writing experiences. Encourage real-life opportunities to write at home. The interest you express will further the academic growth and development begun at school.

In our classroom, we will be keeping a portfolio of the student's written work. It will contain work selected by your child and work chosen by myself. Your child will share the portfolio with you several times throughout the year.

I am interested in your views on writing instruction, and so I've attached a parent survey and a consent form for you to complete and return. I value your opinions and ideas, look forward to your responses, and appreciate your time and effort given to complete these forms.

Sincerely,

Appendix E
Consent Form
September, 1996

Saint Xavier University Field Based Master Program

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

"Helping Students Become More Effective Communicators Through The Proper Use Of Spelling And Conventions In Their Writing"

This research project is being conducted by Miriam Aravena, Dena Farrell, Barbara Messina, and Sharon Neswold. Its purpose is to improve student writing by blending a whole language curriculum with the basic conventions of good writing. Students will be exposed to an enriched language environment. To monitor growth in this area we will conduct surveys, inventories, and formal tests. The responses to any surveys, inventories, and tests will remain confidential and anonymous. If you will allow your child to participate in these assessments, please sign the consent form below and return it to me at school by _____. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

I acknowledge that the purpose of the assessments has been explained to me, and any question I have about the program and my child's participation can be addressed by contacting the teacher. I voluntarily consent to my child's participation in assessment, and I understand that any information gathered during the program will be completely confidential and anonymous.

_____
(Name of Minor Participant)

_____ _____
(Signature of Parent/Legal Guardian) Date

Appendix F
Parent Survey Results
September, 1996

Response: Number/Percentage	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree
1. My school's writing program is effective for my child.	18 25%	39 53%	12 16%
2. My child understands the writing process.	18 25%	44 60%	11 14%
3. In writing, I think ideas are more important than spelling, punctuation, capitalization.	12 16%	24 33%	26 36%
4. I would be comfortable helping my child with spelling.	38 52%	34 46%	0 0%
5. I would be comfortable helping my child with writing.	50 68%	23 32%	0 0%

Response: Number/Percentage	Excellent	Good	Average
6. In general, my child tends to be a/an _____ speller.	5 6%	24 33%	30 41%

Response: Number/Percentage	Always	Sometimes	Never
7. The teachers in our school follow a consistent and unified writing program across the grade levels.	22 30%	50 68%	1 1%
8. During free time, my child chooses to write.	3 4%	56 76%	14 20%

Response: Number/Percentage	Mechanics	Clarity	Daily writing
9. In general, my primary concerns about my child's writing skills are:	23 27%	10 12%	9 11%

Response: Number/Percentage	Daily writing	E. S. L.	Mechanics
10. Teachers in school could help my child's writing by:	13 15%	8 10%	7 8%

Quiz for Capitalization and Punctuation Skills

Student Name:_____ Date:_____

Directions: For each of the following items, provide the correct capitalization and punctuation.

Capitalization

1. the day was beautiful.
2. my birthday is march 7, 1947.
3. he lives near lake erie.
4. we study math and science.
5. is grant school near wing park?
6. the girl said, "wait for me."
7. beverly cleary is one of my favorite authors.
8. does clifton avenue cross maple street?
9. the class invited mrs. smith to speak.
10. i went with my mother to the mall.

Punctuation

Period

1. Jean went to Europe last summer
2. He arrived at 10:45 a m
3. Dr Smith is our family physician
4. The doll was probably made in 1800 B C
5. J F Kennedy was a president

Colon

1. He bought the following fruits apples, peaches, pears.
2. Dear Sir
3. She came at 9 15 this morning.

Comma

1. Robert entered the race but he did not win.
2. They were married on Tuesday May 6 1995.
3. She said "It is time for me to go home."
4. The farmer sold corn hay oats potatoes and wheat.
5. Tom came from Dallas Texas.

Quotation Marks

1. Are you ill? she asked.
2. I like to read the poem, Snowy Day.
3. Did Fred ask, Where have you been?

Apostrophe

1. The man isnt here.
2. That birds song is beautiful.
3. Its time to go home.
4. Boys suits are on sale.
5. She wasnt at school.

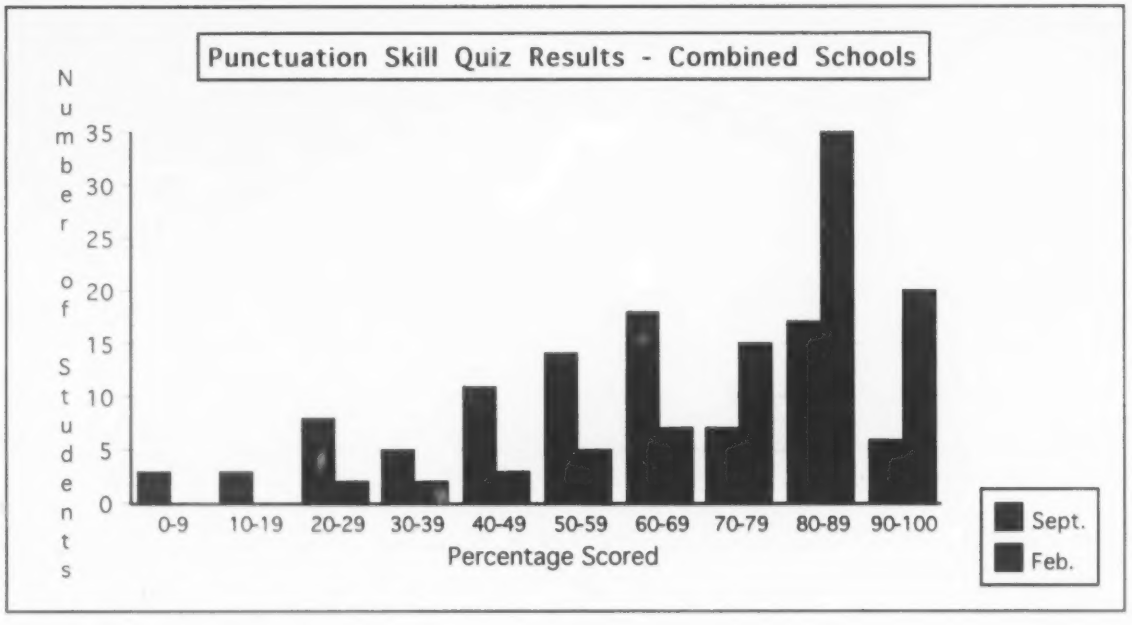
Question Mark

1. Have you seen my new hat
2. "Where have you been " she asked.
3. Will you help me

Exclamation Mark

1. "Fire Fire " she yelled.
2. "Ouch " he shouted.

Appendix H
Punctuation Skill Quiz Results - Combined Schools
September, 1996 and February, 1997



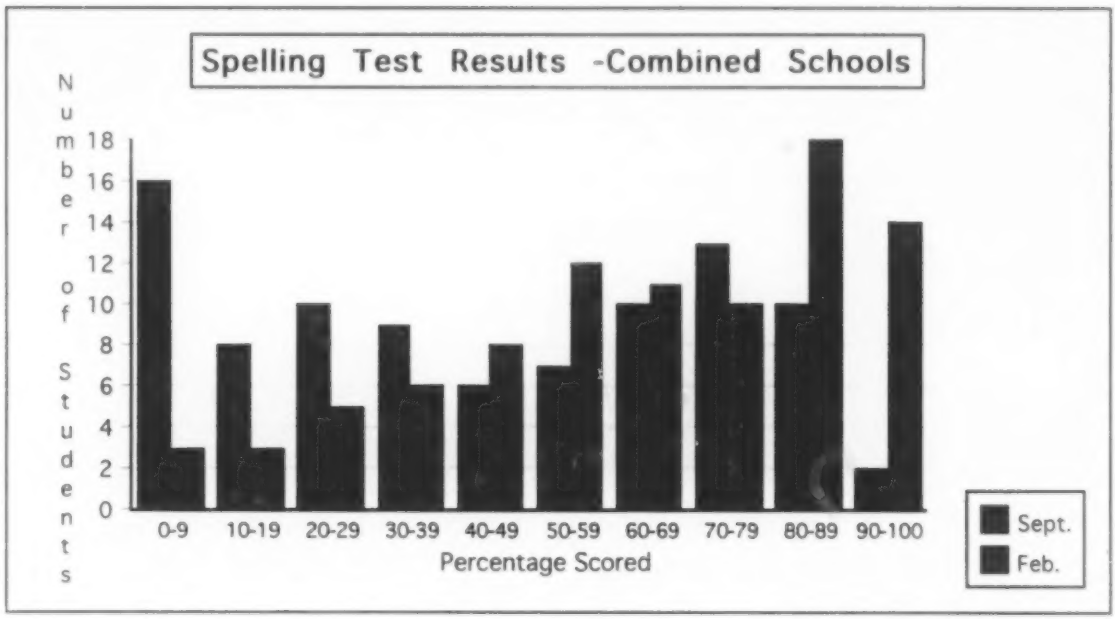
GRADE 3 SPELLING TEST

1. bath
2. neck
3. fish
4. stop
5. jump
6. take
7. line
8. page
9. away
10. feet
11. read
12. life
13. tie
14. home
15. rope
16. took
17. new
18. town
19. toy
20. soft
21. story
22. city
23. just
24. mother
25. example
26. their
27. there
28. they're
29. taking
30. dropping
31. raced
32. every
33. skies
34. unhappy
35. rewrite
36. slowly
37. cheerful
38. happiness
39. you're
40. doesn't
41. dark
42. first
43. airplane

GRADE 4 SPELLING TEST

1. plants
2. kept
3. wind
4. body
5. hundred
6. eight
7. snake
8. green
9. eagle
10. piece
11. inside
12. close
13. grow
14. United States
15. few
16. group
17. fruit
18. ground
19. walk
20. though
21. built
22. ruler
23. before
24. island
25. half
26. there
27. they're
28. their
29. see
30. sea
31. place
32. edge
33. puzzle
34. number
35. living
36. drummed
37. cried
38. countries
39. morning
40. person
41. America
42. family
43. coin
44. destroy
45. rewrite
46. mislead
47. excuse
48. predict
49. happiness
50. friction

Appendix J
Spelling Test Results - Combined Schools
September, 1996 and February, 1997



Appendix K
Writing Prompt
September, 1996 and February, 1997

WRITING PROMPT:

Think about a time when you did something that made you feel good. It could be when you helped a team, sang, or played music for others. It could be a time when you were nice or did a special favor for someone. It could be when you did something you had never done before. The important thing is that you felt good about what you did.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT:

Write a paper doing the following:

Choose one time when you felt good about something you did.

Be sure to tell about the people, what happened, and how you felt during and after it happened.

Do not write about a make-believe time. Tell about something that really happened.

Check Points to Remember:

Carefully arrange your ideas. Remember what you know about paragraphs.

Use correct language for the teachers who will read your paper.

Check that you correct sentences, punctuation, and spelling.

Appendix L
Writing Prompt Rubric

Name: _____ _____		Grading period 1 2 3 4			
Skills	**No Evidence**	**Poor**	**Weak**	**Good**	**Excellent**
Period at the end of a sentence					
after abbreviations					
after an initial					
Question Mark at the end of a sentence					
Exclamation Mark after words or sentences showing excitement or strong feeling					
Quotation Marks before/after direct quotations					
Apostrophe in contractions					
to show possession					
Comma to separate words in a series					
between day and year					
between city and state					
to separate a quote from the speaker					
before the conjunction in a compound sentence					
Colon before a list					
in writing time					
Hyphen to divide a word at the end of a line					
Capital Letters beginning of a sentence					
proper nouns					
Complete Sentences					
Subject/Verb agreement					
Paragraph Indentation					
Correct Spelling					

Appendix M
Writing Prompt Results
September, 1996

Response: Number/Percentage	No Evidence		Poor		Weak		Good		Excellent	
Period										
at the end of a sentence	22	25%	29	32%	7	8%	11	12%	21	23%
after abbreviations	81	90%	8	9%	0	0%	1	1%	0	0%
after an initial	83	92%	7	8%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Question Mark										
at the end of a sentence	89	99%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Exclamation Mark										
after words or sentences showing excitement or strong feeling	77	86%	11	12%	2	2%	0	0%	0	0%
Quotation Marks										
before/after direct quotations	75	84%	12	13%	0	0%	2	2%	1	1%
around title of a poem, short story, song, or TV show	82	91%	8	9%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Apostrophe										
in contractions	81	91%	3	3%	2	2%	2	2%	2	2%
to show possession	79	88%	9	10%	0	0%	1	1%	1	1%
Comma										
to separate words in a series	77	86%	3	3%	1	1%	5	6%	4	4%
between day and year	89	99%	0	0%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%
between city and state	89	99%	0	0%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%
to separate a quote from the speaker	77	86%	2	2%	9	10%	0	0%	2	2%
before the conjunction in a compound sentence	66	74%	16	18%	3	3%	2	2%	3	3%
Colon										
before a list	90	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
in writing time	90	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Hyphen										
to divide a word at the end of a line	65	73%	20	22%	1	1%	3	3%	1	1%
Capital Letters										
beginning of a sentence	24	26%	23	26%	7	8%	13	14%	23	26%
proper nouns	48	53%	18	20%	4	4%	7	8%	13	14%
Complete Sentences	27	29%	20	22%	14	16%	14	16%	15	17%
Subject/Verb agreement	33	36%	11	12%	9	10%	5	6%	32	36%
Paragraph Indentation	33	36%	31	34%	14	16%	5	6%	7	8%
Correct Spelling	13	14%	26	29%	26	29%	18	20%	7	8%
Number of students = 90										

Appendix N
Parent Survey Results
February, 1997

Response: Number/Percentage	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. My school's writing program is effective for my child.	10	38	2	0
	20%	76%	4%	0%
2. My child understands the writing process.	11	37	2	0
	22%	74%	4%	0%
3. In writing, I think ideas are more important than spelling, punctuation, capitalization.	9	17	18	6
	18%	34%	36%	12%
4. I would be comfortable helping my child with spelling.	27	16	7	0
	54%	32%	14%	0%
5. I would be comfortable helping my child with writing.	27	20	3	0
	54%	40%	6%	0%

Response: Number/Percentage	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor
6. In general, my child tends to be a/an _____ speller.	5	24	18	3
	10%	48%	36%	6%

Response: Number/Percentage	Always	Sometimes	Never
7. The teachers in our school follow a consistent and unified writing program across the grade levels.	25	20	5
	50%	40%	10%
8. During free time, my child chooses to write.	4	34	12
	8%	68%	24%

Response: Number/Percentage	Mechanics	Clarity	Daily writing
9. In general, my primary concerns about my child's writing skills are:	15	4	4
	30%	8%	8%

Response: Number/Percentage	Daily writing	E. S. L.	Mechanics
10. Teachers in school could help my child's writing by:	5	7	6
	10%	14%	12%

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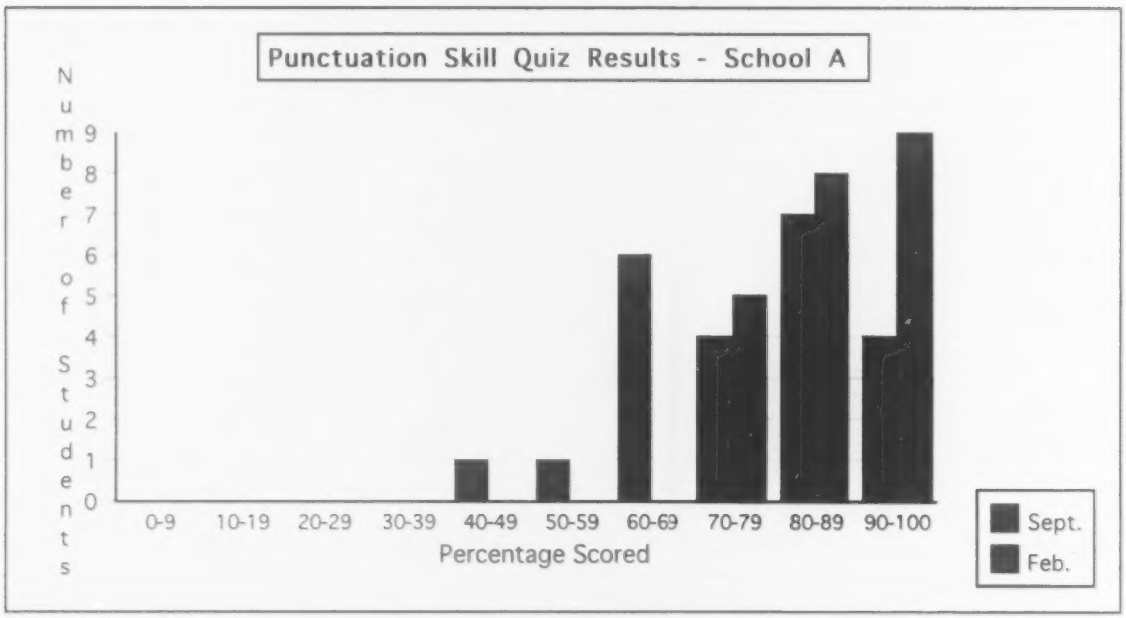
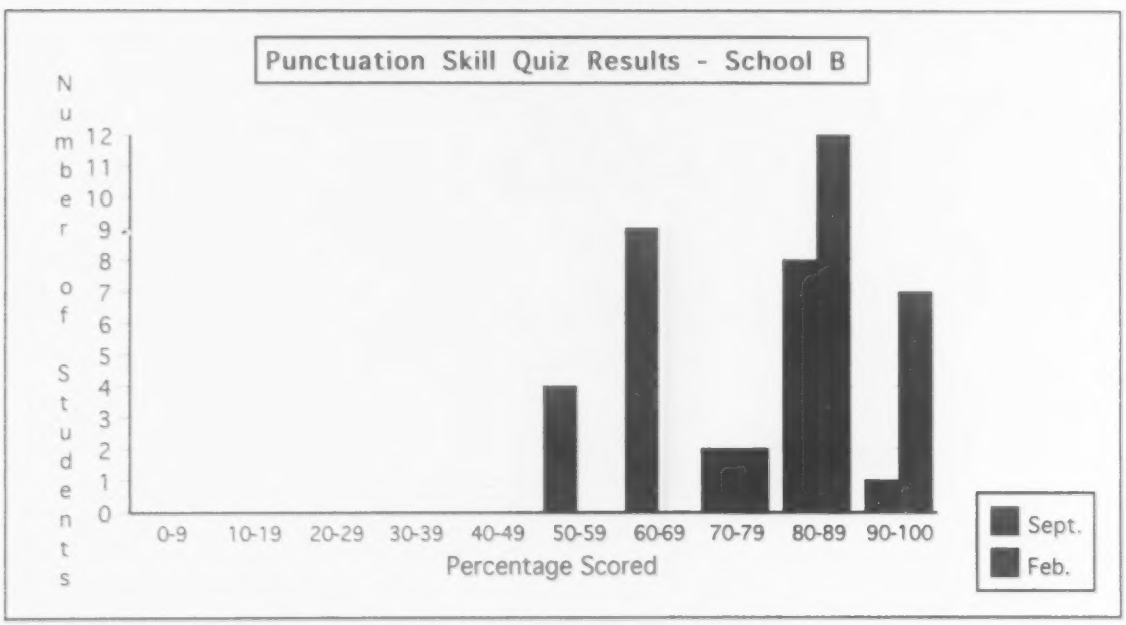
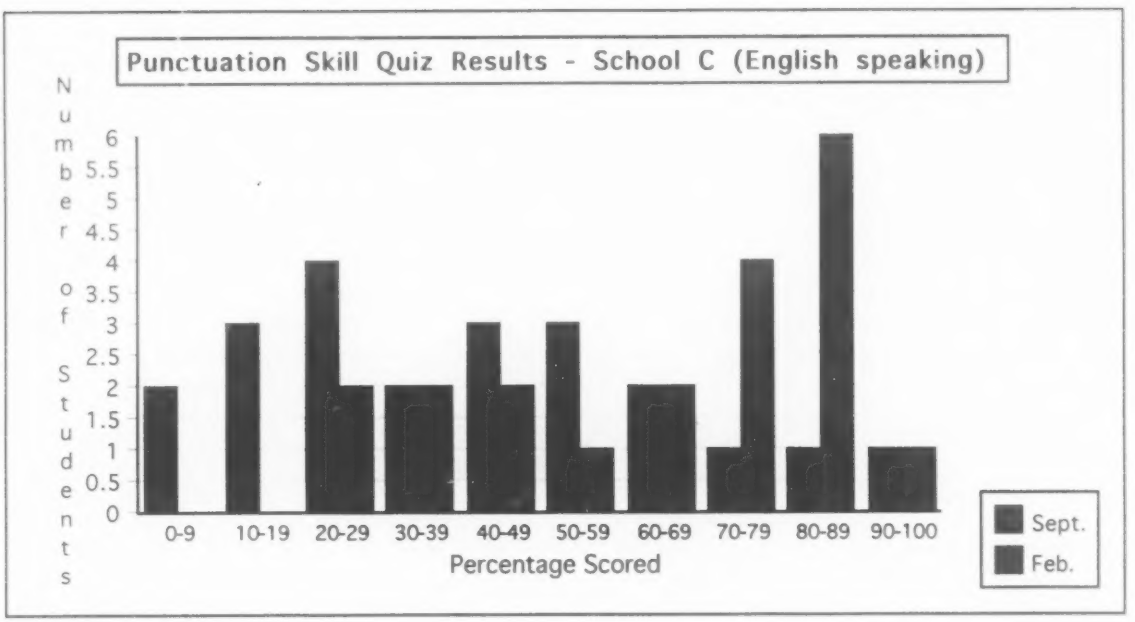
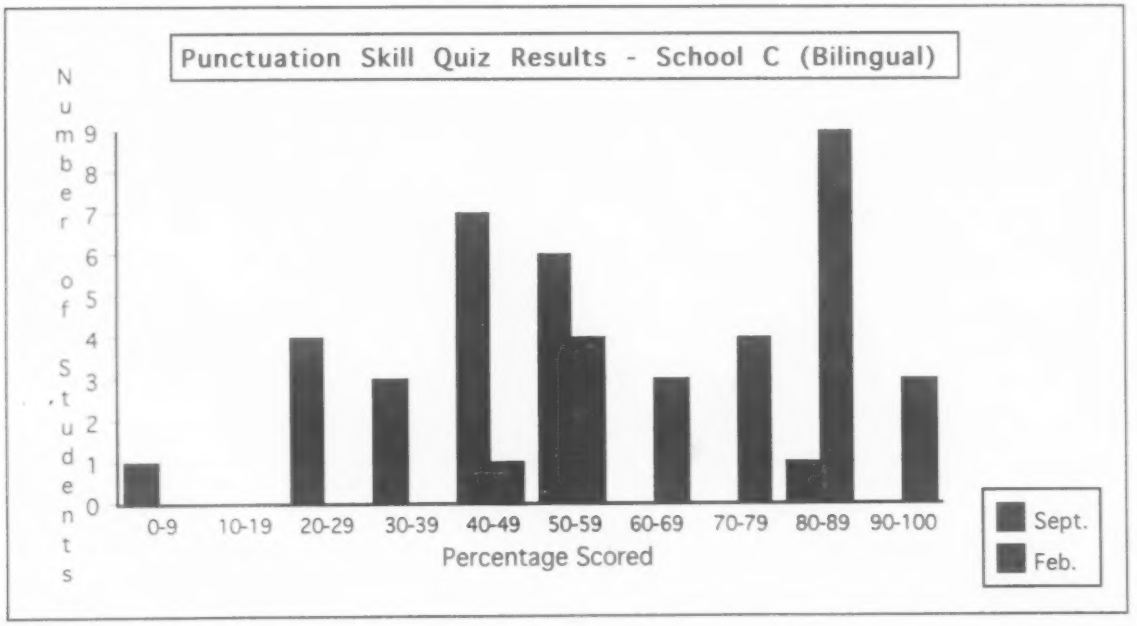
Appendix O
Punctuation Skills Quiz Results -Schools A and B
September, 1996 and February, 1997


Punctuation Skill Quiz Results - School A
Number of Students
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
0-9 10-19 20-29 30-39 40-49 50-59 60-69 70-79 80-89 90-100
Percentage Scored
Sept.
Feb.

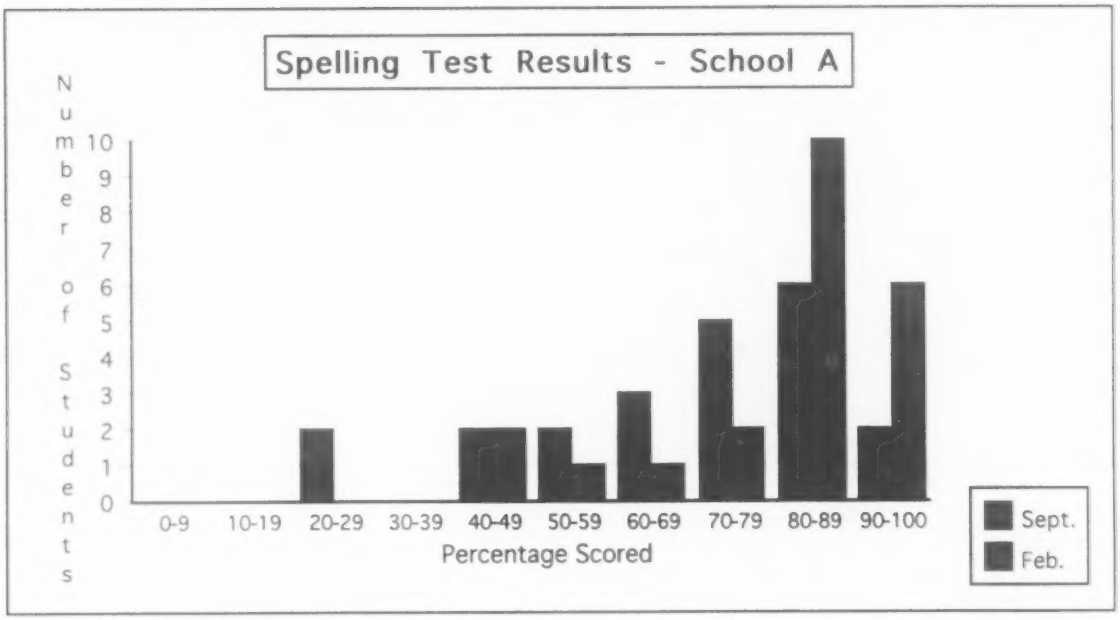

Punctuation Skill Quiz Results - School B
Number of Students
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
0-9 10-19 20-29 30-39 40-49 50-59 60-69 70-79 80-89 90-100
Percentage Scored
Sept.
Feb.

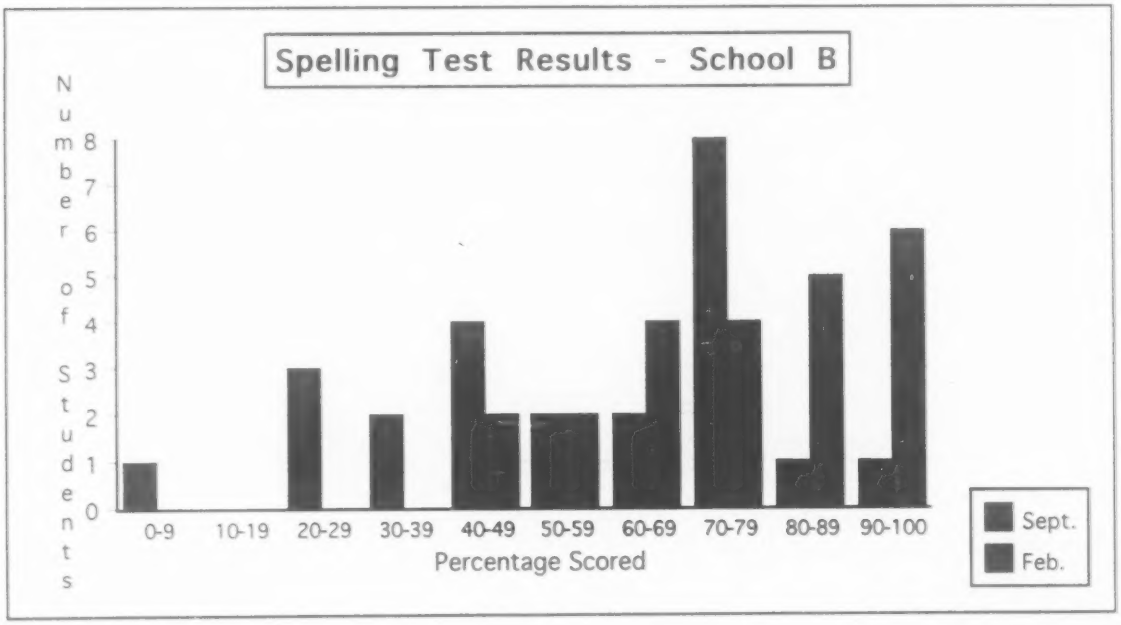
Appendix O
Punctuation Skills Quiz Results - School C
English Speaking and Bilingual
September, 1996 and February, 1997



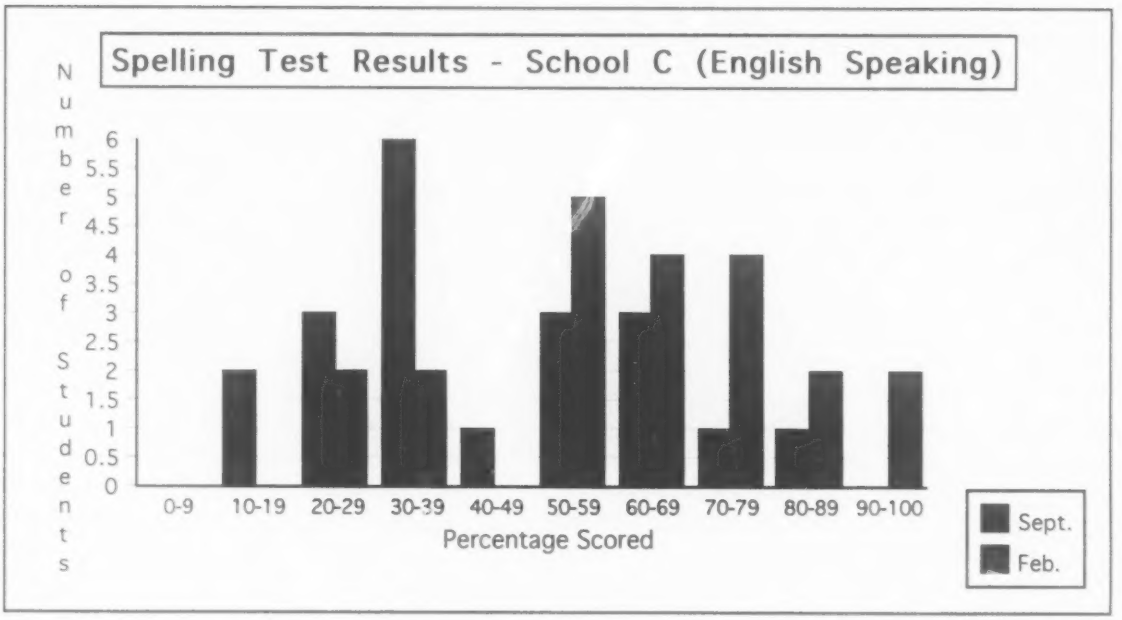


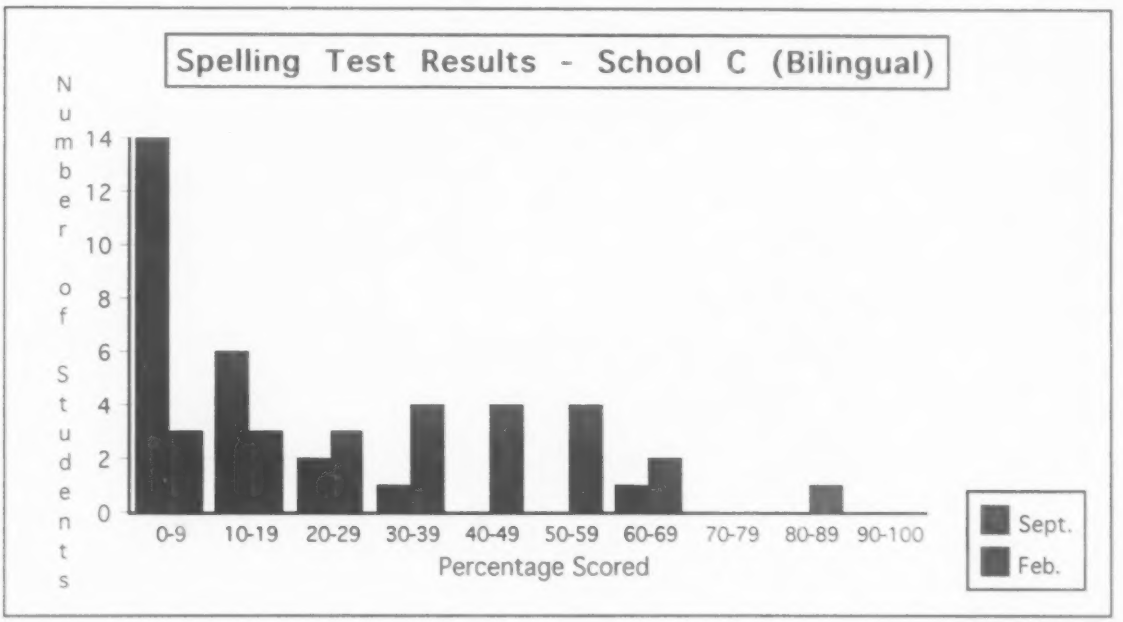
Appendix P
Spelling Test Results - Schools A and B
September, 1996 and February, 1997





Appendix P
Spelling Test Results - School C
English Speaking and Bilingual
September, 1996 and February, 1997





Appendix Q
Writing Prompt Results
February, 1997

Response: Number/Percentage	No Evidence		Poor		Weak		Good		Excellent	
Period										
at the end of a sentence	22	25%	29	32%	7	8%	11	12%	21	23%
after abbreviations	81	90%	8	9%	0	0%	1	1%	0	0%
after an initial	83	92%	7	8%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Question Mark										
at the end of a sentence	89	99%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Exclamation Mark										
after words or sentences showing excitement or strong feeling	77	86%	11	12%	2	2%	0	0%	0	0%
Quotation Marks										
before/after direct quotations	75	84%	12	13%	0	0%	2	2%	1	1%
around title of a poem, short story, song, or TV show	82	91%	8	9%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Apostrophe										
in contractions	81	91%	3	3%	2	2%	2	2%	2	2%
to show possession	79	88%	9	10%	0	0%	1	1%	1	1%
Comma										
to separate words in a series	77	86%	3	3%	1	1%	5	6%	4	4%
between day and year	89	99%	0	0%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%
between city and state	89	99%	0	0%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%
to separate a quote from the speaker	77	86%	2	2%	9	10%	0	0%	2	2%
before the conjunction in a compound sentence	66	74%	16	18%	3	3%	2	2%	3	3%
Colon										
before a list	90	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
in writing time	90	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Hyphen										
to divide a word at the end of a line	65	73%	20	22%	1	1%	3	3%	1	1%
Capital Letters										
beginning of a sentence	24	26%	23	26%	7	8%	13	14%	23	26%
proper nouns	48	53%	18	20%	4	4%	7	8%	13	14%
Complete Sentences	27	29%	20	22%	14	16%	14	16%	15	17%
Subject/Verb agreement	33	36%	11	12%	9	10%	5	6%	32	36%
Paragraph Indentation	33	36%	31	34%	14	16%	5	6%	7	8%
Correct Spelling	13	14%	26	29%	26	29%	18	20%	7	8%
Number of students = 90										